**Reading #1**

On February 1, 1960, Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, David Richmond, and Ezell Blair, Jr., walked into an F.W. Woolworth Company store in Greensboro, North Carolina, purchased some school supplies, then went to the lunch counter and asked to be served. They knew they probably would not be. The four freshmen at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College were black, and this lunch counter was segregated. Still, as one of the students told UPI, "We believe, since we buy books and papers in the other part of the store, we should get served in this part." [[17]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#17) When they were forced to leave as the store closed, they still had not been served.

This first sit-in had very little effect. C.L. Harris, manager of the store, said of the students, "They can just sit there. It's nothing to me." [[18]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#18) But when a larger group of students returned the next day, wire services picked up the story, and civil rights organizations began to spread the word to other college campuses. Gordon Carey, a representative from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), came down from New York to organize more sit-ins. Ella Baker of the SCLC contacted students on many college campuses. In two weeks, students in eleven cities held sit-ins, primarily at Woolworth's and S.H. Kress stores. Soon stores put signs in the window, saying "NO TRESPASSING," "We Reserve the Right to Service the Public As We See Fit," and "CLOSED - In the Interest of Public Safety." [[19]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#19)

The basic plan of the sit-ins was that a group of students would go to a lunch counter and ask to be served. If they were, they'd move on to the next lunch counter. If they were not, they would not move until they had been. If they were arrested, a new group would take their place. The students always remained nonviolent and respectful. Students in Nashville had some "Do's" and "Don'ts" during sit-ins:

Do show yourself friendly on the counter at all times. Do sit straight and always face the counter. Don't strike back, or curse back if attacked. Don't laugh out. Don't hold conversations. Don't block entrances.

Another part of the sit-ins was that the students would be dressed up in their best Sunday clothing. James J. Kilpatrick, the editor of the *Richmond News Leader* and a vehement segregationist, noted that this created an interesting contrast with the whites who came to harass them:

*“Here were the colored students, in coats, white shirts, ties, and one of them was reading Goethe and one was taking notes from a biology text. [The students often brought schoolbooks with them to sit-ins so they could study.] And here, on the sidewalk outside was a gang of white boys come to heckle, a ragtail rabble, slack-jawed, black-jacketed, grinning fit to kill, and some of them, God save the mark, were waving the proud and honored flag of the Southern States in the last war fought by gentlemen. Eheu! It gives one pause.”* [[20]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#20)

When Northern students heard of the movement, they decided to help their Southern counterparts by picketing local branches of chain stores that were segregated in the South. Martin Smolin, a Columbia student who led picketing at Woolworth's, explained, "People have asked me why northerners, especially white people, who have been in the majority in our picketing demonstrations in New York, take an active part in an issue which doesn't concern them. My answer is that injustice anywhere is everybody's concern." And when a reporter asked Congressman Adam Clayton Powell of Harlem if he was advocating that Negroes in New York stay out of national chain stores such as Woolworth's, he answered, "Oh no. I'm advocating that American citizens interested in democracy stay out of these stores." [[21]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#21)

The first few weeks of sit-ins were fairly quiet. Blacks were not served, but they were not harassed much either. Then, on February 27, sit-in students in Nashville were attacked by a group of white teenagers. Police arrived, but they let the white teens go while arresting the protesters for "disorderly conduct." As each group of protesters was arrested, a new group would take its place. "No matter what they did and how many they arrested, there was still a lunch counter full of students there," explained Diane Nash, one of the leaders of the sit-in movement in Nashville. Z. Alexander Looby, a prominent black lawyer, represented the protesters in court; however, as he began his arguments, the judge literally turned his back. Looby stopped his argument and said, to the judge's back, "What's the use!" [[22]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#22) The judge found the defendants guilty, and they were fined $150 plus court costs. A few days later, 63 protesters were arrested during sit-ins at Nashville's Greyhound and Trailways bus terminals.

Over Easter Weekend, Ella Baker of the SCLC helped organize a conference of sit-in students from around the nation. Held at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, the conference was dubbed the "Sacrifice for Dignity." Older organizations such as SCLC, CORE, and NAACP hoped that the students would create a youth organization inside of them. Baker, however, encouraged the students to form an independent organization. They formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "snick") to lead the sit-in effort.

On April 19, Z. Alexander Looby's home was destroyed by a powerful dynamite blast. Looby was considered to be fairly conservative, so the bombing enraged not only the black community but many whites as well. 2,500 students and community members staged a silent march to City Hall that day. When they reached it, Mayor Ben West was waiting for them. Diane Nash asked him, "Do *you* feel it is wrong to discriminate against a person solely on the basis of their race or color?" West said yes. He later explained, "It was a moral question -- one that a *man* had to answer, not a politician." Nashville merchants were somewhat relieved by West's answer. "The merchants were afraid to move on their own, were almost looking for an excuse to say `Well if that's what the mayor thinks, then maybe we ought to go ahead,'" explained Bernie Schweid. A few weeks later on May 10, six Nashville lunch counters began serving blacks. [[23]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#23) The students in Nashville had won an important victory.

The sit-ins, however, were not over. By August 1961, they had attracted over 70,000 participants and generated over 3,000 arrests. [[24]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#24) They continued in some areas of the South until and even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 declared segregation at lunch counters unlawful. In addition, the technique of the sit-ins was used to integrate other public facilities, such as movie theaters, and SNCC, the student group that rose out of the sit-ins, continued to be involved in the civil rights movement for many years. Perhaps most importantly, the sit-ins marked a change in the civil rights movement. In the words of journalist Louis Lomax, "They were proof that the Negro leadership class, epitomized by the NAACP, was no longer the prime mover in the Negro's social revolt. The demonstrations have shifted the desegregation battles from the courtroom to the marketplace." [[25]](http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/notes.html#25) They showed that nonviolent direct action and youth could be very useful weapons in the war against segregation.

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1. What is the topic of this passage?
2. Is this a primary or secondary source?
3. How do you know whether this is a primary or secondary source?
4. Who is the author?
5. Is this a reliable source? Why or why not?
6. Describe what you have just read in three sentences: